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Know Before You Go Off-Road This Summer Officials Urge Training, Helmet Use for Young Riders

(Salt Lake City, UT) – As thousands of Utahns head to the mountains and deserts for off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation this summer, Utah State Parks and the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) are reminding riders of the importance of training for young riders, helmet use by all riders, and having only one rider at a time per OHV.

UDOH data shows that in 2005, there were 1,565 OHV-related injuries treated in emergency departments; 637 of these were among children ages 5 to 19 and 548 were among adults ages 20-34. In 2005, the cost to Utah's health care system for OHV injuries totaled \$1.5 million for treatment in emergency departments and an additional \$5.9 million in hospitalization expenses.

The 15 to 19-year age group has the highest rate of emergency department visits for OHV injuries at 13.6 per 10,000 population, followed by 20-24 year olds at 10.6 per 10,000. According to UDOH traumatic brain injury (TBI) hospitalization data, they also are the age groups that are least likely to be wearing a helmet when they sustain a TBI. These young TBI victims also experienced more OHV rollovers or flip-overs than other OHV riders who also sustained TBIs.

Ann Evans, Utah State Parks off-highway vehicle education coordinator, says most crashes occur because drivers ignore or overlook manufacturer specifications and Utah law. OHV manufacturers specify which vehicles are designed for one rider only, but too often drivers take friends or family members, sometimes taking two or more passengers at a time.

"More than one rider at a time is very dangerous," said Evans. "OHVs are not built for multiple riders because the added weight shifts the overall center of gravity, making the

-MORE -

Page 2 of 2 – Know Before You Go Off Road

machine more susceptible to tip or roll over.”

OHV riders are encouraged to take the *Know Before You Go!* OHV education course before operating on public lands, roads or trails. It is illegal for any child under age 8 to operate an OHV on public land.

Helmets are required for all OHV operators and passengers under the age of 18. “Despite the law, we see people riding ATVs without helmets all too often,” said Kevin Condra, spokesperson for the Violence and Injury Prevention Program of the Utah Department of Health. “Helmets do save lives and are a good idea for all ages,” he added. Helmets must have at least a U.S. Department of Transportation approved safety rating for motorized use.

Health and State Parks Officials recommend the following when enjoying OHVs:

- Always wear the right size helmet and make sure it is strapped on securely when riding off-highway vehicles.
- Have children take the Utah Department of Parks and Recreation OHV training.
- Allow children to ride only ATVs that the manufacture indicates are appropriate for their age.
- Never carry passengers on an ATV designed for one rider.
- Don’t drive or ride on an ATV while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Don’t operate ATVs on paved roads. Their soft tires make them prone to rolling over on smooth surfaces.
- Wear protective gear like gloves, over-the-ankle boots, and goggles.

Education classes play an important role in injury prevention by teaching young riders and their parents about safe riding, weight distribution, handling, shifting, speed, and riding within your ability. Classes are available throughout Utah.

For more information, please contact the Utah State Parks and Recreation OHV Education office at 1-800-OHV-RIDE or visit www.stateparks.utah.gov.

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